

**Board of Veterans Services
Meeting Minutes
July 10, 2006**

A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on Monday, July 10, 2006, at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond.

Members Present

John Anderson; Vince Burgess; Kirk Cox; John Edwards; Paul Galanti; Thad Jones; Caroline Lane; Bill Leighty; Samuel Metters; Al Sample; Judson Stanley; Jim Walker; and Frank Wickersham.

Members Absent

Mark Cole; John Hanson; Jay O'Brien; Bettye Simmons; and Vivian Watts.

Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present

C. L. "Bert" Boyd, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Veterans Services; Steve Combs, Director of Policy and Planning, Department of Veterans Services; Rhonda Earman, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services; Fred Fralin, Benefits Services Manager, Department of Veterans Services; Dan Kemano, Cemeteries Administrator, Department of Veterans Services; Annie Mosby, Director, State Approving Agency for Veterans Education and Training, Department of Veterans Services; Cindy Norwood, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General; Becky Roop, Information Technology Manager, Department of Veterans Services; Bill Van Thiel, Administrator, Virginia Veterans Care Center, Department of Veterans Services; and Ron White, Department of General Services.

Others Present

Daniel Cortez, Military Order of the Purple Heart; Roger Overstreet and Roger Sullivan, Virginia Veterans Coalition; and Ronald Hudson.

Materials Distributed

Meeting agenda; draft minutes of the April 4, 2006, meeting; Executive Orders 2, 18, 19 and 22; Benefits Services Manager's Report to the Board of Veterans Services; Strategic Plan for Professional Development and Training 2006–2008 (for Benefits Services staff); Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center Addition summary; DVS events calendar; DVS Commissioner's Office organizational chart; summary of comments from Ronald L. Hudson, Sr. relating to veterans hiring preference; Cemeteries' Accomplishments Over the Past Quarter; and summary of changes to the Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program.

Call to Order

With 10 of 18 members present, Chairman John Anderson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:30 a.m. Delegate Cox, Bill Leighty and Frank Wickersham arrived shortly after the meeting began. The membership and guests recited the pledge of allegiance to the American flag.

Approval of Minutes

A **motion** was made by Judson Stanley, seconded by Vince Burgess and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 4, 2006 meeting, with the following changes:

P. 5, 1st ¶ – change “Mr.” Lane to “Ms.” Lane; and

P. 5, 2nd ¶ – delete the third sentence and add “Ms. Lane added that it is important for community volunteers to tailor their efforts to the needs of each individual cemetery.”

DVS Commissioner’s Update

Commissioner Burgess reported that since the last Board meeting, there has been a lot of activity within the agency, as well as actions by the General Assembly and Governor relating to legislation and budget appropriations.

Commissioner Burgess introduced the new Director of Communications, Anne Atkins, who is on loan to DVS from the Department of Motor Vehicles. Commissioner Burgess then distributed a new organizational chart for the Commissioner’s Office. Commissioner Burgess also reported that Roz Trent is now providing direct support to the Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees (VSF), in response to one of the items that came out of the recent VSF retreat.

Commissioner Burgess advised that Steve Combs is now serving as Policy and Planning Director and will continue his work with legislative affairs and the Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Burgess also advised that Armistead Ransone has joined DVS as its Director of Finance and Administration. Commissioner Burgess said Mr. Ransone recently came out of retirement to fill this role, and has 30 years of finance and budget experience in state government.

Commissioner Burgess then recognized Deputy Secretary of Public Safety Marilyn Harris, who represented the Secretary’s Office at the meeting.

Commissioner Burgess also recognized Assistant Attorney General Cindy Norwood, who substituted for Assistant Attorney General Don Ferguson at the meeting.

Commissioner Burgess then called attention to the following Executive Orders:

- **EO 2, Community Integration for Virginians with Disabilities.** Commissioner Burgess explained that this initiative was begun by the Warner Administration and is being continued by the Kaine Administration. Commissioner Burgess said that since late 2005, DVS has been participating on the interagency team charged with implementing the provisions of the Order, with Steve Combs serving as the DVS representative.
- **EO 18, Establishing the Virginia Citizen-Soldier Support Council.** Commissioner Burgess advised that this also is a group that was established by the Warner Administration and is being continued by the Kaine Administration. Commissioner Burgess emphasized that

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DVS is working in concert with the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) with this group, which provides support to the Virginia National Guard and Reserve.

- **EO 19, Serving Virginia's Veterans.** Commissioner Burgess advised that EO 19 was issued in follow-up to EO 40. Commissioner Burgess said that EO 19 establishes goals to take service to Virginia veterans to the next level. Commissioner Burgess noted that EO 19 directs DVS to report on programs and services currently offered, and those that need to be established. Commissioner Burgess added that EO 19 also provides for new and expanded services to veterans, especially those with disabilities, by all entities of state government. Commissioner Burgess explained that EO 19 also directs that the JLC develop legislative priorities jointly with the Board of Veterans Services. Commissioner Burgess added that DVS and other state agencies must provide a report to the Governor on compliance with the Order by April 30, 2007.
- **EO 22, Establishing the Virginia Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy.** Commissioner Burgess reported that 11% (or approximately 3,000) of prisoners in Virginia's correctional system are veterans. Commissioner Burgess said that DVS is working with Executive Branch agencies to address the needs of these veterans and their families.

Commissioner Burgess also reported said that DVS is working with the Virginia Interagency Council on Homelessness (VICH). Commissioner Burgess said that the VICH is a policy council established to address the needs of the homeless in Virginia. Commissioner Burgess promised to send more information about this group and its activities to Board members.

Commissioner Burgess then reported on the addition to the new Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center (SBVCC). Commissioner Burgess explained that the addition has now been reduced from 80 beds to 40 beds, primarily due to the issue of quality of care for the residents. All rooms will be single-occupancy, which will better serve the needs and wishes of residents by permitting privacy and helping to prevent the spread of disease. Commissioner Burgess noted that the footprint of the facility also played a role in the decision to reduce the number of additional beds, adding that single-occupancy rooms on a single level changed the layout and square footage of the facility.

Commissioner Burgess advised that DVS is taking short-term and long-term steps to ensure the security of Virginia veterans' electronic data, in light of the recent compromise of data by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Commissioner Burgess explained some of the security measures being taken, including:

- Veterans Services Representatives (VSRs) are no longer allowed to take their laptop computers home;
- Data is now being encrypted on mobile and desktop computers; and

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- A secure web-based database is being developed, with the server hosted by the Virginia Information Technologies Agency, eliminating the need for storage of data on mobile computers. Mr. Burgess said this step probably will be completed by Fall, 2006.

Commissioner Burgess then reported that DVS distributed a news release on July 10 with respect to HB 1272 (Janis), which was passed during the 2006 General Assembly session. The bill amends the statute dealing with the Virginia War Orphans Education Program, now known as the Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (MSDEP). Commissioner Burgess said that the news release would be sent to all Board members. Commissioner Burgess asked Chief Operating Officer Bert Boyd to provide a brief summary of MSDEP. Mr. Boyd distributed a handout and outlined some of the highlights of the MSDEP changes:

- Spouses are now eligible for a waiver of tuition, not just surviving children, as before;
- Age limitation has been increased from 25 to 29;
- Survivors of veterans with at least a 90% service-connected disability are now entitled to the benefits, versus 100% disabled, as before; and
- Only survivors of honorably discharged veterans may now participate in MSDEP.

Commissioner Burgess said that in addition to the news release and posting on the DVS web site, DVS is working to market MSDEP to high school counselors, college administrators and financial aid workers. Commissioner Burgess stated that MSDEP information also will be widely distributed to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). Mr. Boyd added that DVS will work with the VA to identify family members of disabled veterans who may be eligible under MSDEP. Mr. Leighty emphasized the importance of identifying eligible individuals and contacting them directly.

Chairman Anderson then recognized Deputy Secretary of Public Safety Marilyn Harris. Ms. Harris said she was honored to represent Secretary Marshall at the meeting. Mr. Harris recognized the sacrifices of the servicemen and women who have served the Commonwealth and the Nation. Ms. Harris emphasized that because of the appreciation for this service and sacrifice, the Governor and the General Assembly have worked together to double the resources of DVS to better serve Virginia veterans. Ms. Harris added that the increase in available resources will enhance visibility in the veteran community, and she expressed her confidence in Commissioner Burgess and his staff to utilize those resources to greatest advantage for Virginia veterans. Ms. Harris concluded her remarks by saying that the Public Safety Secretariat looks forward to working with DVS and the Board.

Limited Public Comment

Roger Overstreet was recognized as the first public speaker. Mr. Overstreet asked if any service officers had been hired and, if so, where were they located. Commissioner Burgess responded that funding for three new VSR positions was allocated by the 2006 General Assembly and that the VSRs will be placed in Loudoun County; the Salem VA Medical Center; and the Hampton VA Medical Center. Commissioner Burgess stated that funding for administrative support positions also was allocated, but that DVS has not yet been determined which office they will serve in. Commissioner Burgess noted that another position will be filled to replace the VSR position vacated in the Richmond Benefits Services Office.

Roger Sullivan was then recognized as the next public speaker. Mr. Sullivan urged that the veterans advocates present familiarize themselves with U. S. Senate Bill 2762. Mr. Sullivan stated he had attended Board meetings for several years, and he expressed frustration that his suggestions had not been recognized or implemented by the Board or DVS. Mr. Sullivan emphasized the importance of VSRs attending VSO conventions, and he noted his dissatisfaction that there were no VSRs present at some of the recent VSO meetings. Mr. Sullivan praised VVCC and cemeteries staff for doing an excellent job in operating those facilities, but stated he believed there is a deficiency in the level of service provided by the Benefits Services section.

Mr. Stanley echoed Mr. Sullivan's comments with respect to VSR representation at VSO meetings and the need to enhance Benefits service delivery; Mr. Wickersham emphasized the importance of the JLC collaborating with DVS to achieve this. Mr. Walker added that it is important for DVS Benefits Services offices to be staffed full-time and have DVS representatives present where veterans congregate.

Ronald Hudson was then recognized as the third public speaker. Mr. Hudson distributed a handout and spoke in support of the veterans hiring preference, in follow-up to his presentation at the last Board meeting. Chairman Anderson requested that the Office of the Attorney General provide the Board counsel on this issue.

Report from the Nominating Subcommittee and Election of Officers

Al Sample reported that the Subcommittee had been charged with the responsibility of advancing nominations for the positions of Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary. Mr. Sample recited the initial and current composition of the Subcommittee:

Al Sample;
Leon Sanchez, who was replaced by Bill Leighty due to Mr. Sanchez's resignation from the Board;
Delegate Vivian Watts; and
Thad Jones, who replaced Bill Leighty due his resignation from the Subcommittee.

Mr. Sample stated that several nominations were received, carefully reviewed and duly qualified by the Subcommittee. Mr. Sample advised that all nominations received were advanced for consideration and voting by the Board:

Chairperson – Paul Galanti, Judson Stanley and John Anderson;
Vice Chairperson – John Anderson and Bettye Simmons; and
Secretary – Judson Stanley and Thad Jones.

Mr. Sample recited the recommendations of the Subcommittee:

- A vote be taken by show of hands or voice and recorded by a representative from the DVS Commissioner's Office or by Subcommittee member Thad Jones; and
- The Chairman exercise his right to call for additional nominations from the membership.

Judson Stanley declined to be considered for the position of Chairperson, in favor of Paul Galanti. Chairman Anderson then called for additional nominations for the position of Chairperson, and there were none. Chairman Anderson thanked the Board for the trust it has placed in him in his service as Chairman. Chairman Anderson then withdrew his name from consideration as Chairperson and asked for the Board's unanimous support of Paul Galanti as Chairperson. Bill Leighty made a **motion** that Paul Galanti be elected as Chairperson by acclimation; the motion was seconded by Samuel Metters and passed unanimously.

Dr. Anderson then withdrew his name from consideration as a candidate for the position of Vice Chairperson and asked if there were any other nominations for the position of Vice Chairperson. Jim Walker asked that Judson Stanley be nominated for this position. The following vote was recorded for the position of Vice Chairperson: two votes in favor of Bettye Simmons; and 9 votes in favor of Judson Stanley.

Dr. Anderson called for additional nominations for the position of Secretary, and there were none. Judson Stanley withdrew his name from consideration as a candidate for this position. Bill Leighty made a **motion** that Thad Jones be elected by acclimation; the motion was seconded by Vince Burgess and passed unanimously.

Subcommittee Reports

Cemeteries Subcommittee

Caroline Lane began her report by saying that she had met with Commissioner Burgess and Cemeteries Administrator Dan Kemano to develop a strategy for moving cemetery operations and activities forward over the next year.

Ms. Lane advised that Memorial Day ceremonies were held at both cemeteries and that she is very pleased with the progress of the Horton Cemetery in Suffolk. Commissioner Burgess added that Secretary Marshall attended both events. Ms. Lane encouraged Board members to attend Memorial Day or Veterans Day ceremonies and to support citizen involvement in cemetery operations.

Ms. Lane asked Mr. Kemano to provide a report on cemeteries operations. Mr. Kemano distributed a handout and thanked the VSOs and volunteers who sponsored and worked to ensure the success of the Memorial Day ceremonies.

Mr. Kemano said he and Commissioner Burgess have been in communication with representatives of Virginia Logos to discuss the possibility of increasing the size of Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) road signage for the cemeteries. Mr. Kemano said Virginia Logos is working with VDOT and local government to determine if applicable regulations and ordinances allow for larger signs.

Mr. Kemano reported that the progress on the third veterans cemetery in Southwest Virginia is going well, with approval by the U. S. Senate and the President of the United States remaining.

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Mr. Kemano called attention to the cemeteries interment report included in his handout, indicating an increase in burials at both cemeteries over the past Fiscal Year. Mr. Kemano also reported on aesthetic improvements, equipment purchases and staffing for both cemeteries.

Mr. Stanley spoke in support of approaching private land owners to request that road signage for the Amelia cemetery be placed on their property, especially at the turn from Route 360 and the next right turn. Mr. Stanley suggested that funding for the signs could come from local government and the historical society, as well as VSOs and other donors. Mr. Stanley emphasized the need for signage that would honor veterans, and suggested that VDOT signage does not accomplish that purpose. Commissioner Burgess responded that he would be happy to meet with local government officials and others to accomplish this objective. Mr. Kemano suggested that there also should be signage on the less traveled roads, especially from the southeastern Virginia area.

Commissioner Burgess thanked Senator Edwards and Delegate Dudley for their efforts in positioning the Commonwealth to obtain the property donation and state funding for the Southwest Virginia cemetery.

Delegate Cox asked what the increase in burials at Amelia could be attributed to, and Mr. Kemano responded that he believed that relationships with funeral directors in the area was largely responsible, as well as the cemetery now being open for funerals five days per week and on holidays.

Care Centers Subcommittee

Mr. Walker began his report by discussing the renovation project at the VVCC. Mr. Walker said the project, despite some minor delays, has gone well and soon will be completed.

Mr. Walker also reported on the status of the VVCC canteen operation. Mr. Walker said that in accordance with state law, the Department of Blind and Vision Impaired has the first option of staffing this type of operation in all state facilities. Mr. Walker advised that in order to staff the canteen with veterans, state legislation needs to be introduced to amend current law, stating that canteens in veterans care centers shall be operated by VSO volunteers.

Mr. Walker advised that the reduction in the number of beds for the SBVCC addition was attributed to the following factors:

- Decreased purchase value due to the time that has elapsed since the initial planning for the facility; and
- Change in standards of care and types of care that impact staffing and other considerations.

Mr. Walker said that study and demographic data were used to determine current trends in long-term care, including single-floor design, private rooms and the increase in the number of female veterans. Mr. Walker called attention to the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center Addition handout. Mr. Walker emphasized that private rooms provide privacy and better accommodate

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residents with psychological disorders, as well as help prevent the spread of disease and pathogens.

Mr. Walker added that the SBVCC construction project is going well and probably ahead of schedule. Mr. Walker thanked Ron White and other Department of General Services staff for their excellent work on the project.

Mr. Walker added that the Veterans Care Center Advisory Committee has issued a Request for Information for a comprehensive study on the requirements for long-care in the Commonwealth, the results of which will aid in the placement, design and staffing of future veterans care centers. Commissioner Burgess said the results of the study would be provided to the Board.

Benefits Subcommittee

Mr. Galanti began his report by discussing the recent in-service training for VSRs. Mr. Galanti praised the quality of the training and the amount of effort that was put into it. Mr. Galanti emphasized the need for properly trained VSRs.

Mr. Galanti said he had received an enormous amount of positive feedback on the Veterans Op/Ed pieces that have been published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Mr. Galanti said the issue of veterans hiring preference is a sensitive one, and Chairman Anderson asked for the guidance of the Attorney General's Office on laws relating to this subject. Mr. Walker added that Public Law 106-50 requires veterans' preference in business contracting by federal agencies. Dr. Metters advised that Public Law 108-183 was enacted subsequent to 106-50, and that the language of both laws is somewhat ambiguous, using the word "may," versus "shall." Dr. Metters said he serves on a committee appointed by President Bush that is attempting to address this issue.

Budget and Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Dr. Metters began his report by asking for input from the Board on budget and strategic planning matters. Dr. Metters urged Board members to read the current Strategic and Service Area Plans, which the Subcommittee plans only to "tweak" for the coming year. Dr. Metters emphasized that the Strategic Plan will guide the DVS budget request and legislative proposal for the next biennial budget.

Dr. Metters advised that the 2006 General Assembly had appropriated budget and personnel increases for DVS. Commissioner Burgess thanked the Governor and General Assembly for their efforts in this regard, adding that DVS is now well positioned to better serve Virginia veterans.

Legislative Update

Senator Edwards praised Commissioner Burgess and Chairman Anderson for their outstanding leadership in service to Virginia veterans.

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Senator Edwards said he has seen veterans' issues given greater priority in the General Assembly in recent years and praised Chief of Staff Bill Leighty for his efforts in helping to make this happen. Senator Edwards said that because of the efforts of the Warner and Kaine Administrations, it is now easier to get veterans legislation passed. Senator Edwards emphasized that one out of every 10 Virginians (or approximately 744,000) is a veteran.

Dr. Metters asked for applause in recognition of Chairman Anderson's service to the Board.

Delegate Cox thanked veterans' advocates for their input on veterans legislation. Delegate Cox also suggested that DVS report to the House Appropriations Committee on the progress it has made with recent funding appropriations. Delegate Cox said the report should include statistics such as the number of veterans reached and how the funds have been expended. Delegate Cox suggested that DVS contact Appropriations Committee staff to schedule such a meeting some time in September. Delegate Cox thanked Bill Leighty and Governor Kaine for their support of veterans' issues.

Comments from the Chairpersons

There was no comment from the Chairman of the Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees, due to his absence from the meeting.

Frank Wickersham began his report by recognizing the Governor and the General Assembly for a positive legislative session. Mr. Wickersham said the JLC soon will finalize its Legislative Agenda for the 2007 General Assembly session, which includes 27 issues. Mr. Wickersham said that many of the items discussed at today's Board meeting are included as action items in the agenda and that the JLC looks forward to working closely with the Board over the next year on legislative priorities.

Mr. Leighty emphasized the importance of placing DVS under the Public Safety Secretariat because of the close proximity to military matters it provides, adding that the Virginia Military Advisory Council is comprised of the garrison and major command commanders of all of military installations in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Anderson thanked the Board members for their hard work in promoting veterans issues in the Commonwealth and for helping to facilitate better programs and services for Virginia veterans, citing the increase in the number of VSRs, veterans' cemeteries and veterans' care centers. Dr. Anderson also praised the bi-partisan efforts of the executive and legislative branches in support of Virginia veterans.

Date and Location of Next Meeting

There was discussion on scheduling Board meetings in certain months in the interest of planning for and reporting on the legislative session. A **motion** was made by Bill Leighty, seconded, and passed unanimously that three of the four meetings be held in January, April and September. Chairman Anderson asked newly elected Chairman Galanti to take the matter of when the fourth meeting should be held under advisement and share his recommendations with the Board at the next meeting.

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The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for September 18, 11:30 a.m., at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond.

Open Public Comment and Roundtable Discussion

Daniel Cortez was recognized as a speaker in the second Public Comment period. Mr. Cortez thanked Chairman Anderson and the Board for their efforts in support of Virginia veterans. In follow-up to the discussion about the changes to the Virginia War Orphans Education Program, Mr. Cortez spoke in support of stipends for Virginia veterans to attend out-of-state colleges and universities.

Mr. Cortez thanked Attorney General McDonnell and the members of the House of Delegates who recently visited the McGuire VA Medical Center and toured the SBVCC construction site for their support of veterans' issues. Mr. Cortez emphasized the importance for law and policy makers to visit veterans' hospitals to stay in touch with veterans needs and recognize their sacrifices.

In response to Mr. Cortez's comments about stipends, Mr. Sullivan stated that the stipend is not lost when attending out-of-state schools and that this is not related to benefits under MSDEP.

Adjournment

There being no further business, a **motion** was made, seconded and passed unanimously that the meeting be adjourned at approximately 1:45 p.m.